

Families report \$133,000 in stolen property

By Capt. Jennifer Dickey
Legal office

Military families assigned to RAF Lakenheath reported more than \$133,670 in stolen property between Oct. 1 and March 31.

The majority of claims arose from car break-ins.

"During the first weekend in April alone, we saw four claims for golf bags being stolen from members' POVs," said TSgt. Robert Jarrett, NCO in charge of the claims section. "In two of the cases, the clubs were stolen from locked car trunks."

Presented claims

Of the claims presented, the base legal office paid \$70,260, a little more than half of the amount claimed. Many claims were denied because the member failed to take reasonable steps to safeguard the property.

"The legal office doesn't pay every claim for theft," said Jarrett. "The member must show they took some steps to protect their property. If someone leaves a desirable or easily stolen item in plain view in their POV, we may not pay the claim. We also deny claims for property stolen from unlocked POVs and homes."

"What many people don't know is that the legal office is further limited by Air Force Instructions on the amount it can pay for certain claims. For instance, we can only make a total payment of \$120 for compact discs stolen from a POV, even if the member can prove a greater amount was stolen."

Another common misconception is the "belief that you can make a claim for any theft from your POV," said SrA. Nicole

Ceiling rises for catastrophic losses

BOLLING AFB, D.C. (AFNS) — The limit on personal property claims has more than doubled, and people can file for additional relief for past claims until early next year.

The Defense Authorization Act for 1996 raised the limit on personal property claims from \$40,000 to \$100,000. Air Force legal officials at Bolling said the law affects everyone who has or will suffer personal property losses because of emergency evacuations and extraordinary circumstances due to their service.

The policy change affects military and civilian employees. It is retroactive for those who previously filed a claim and had their claim payment limited by a statutory maximum.

People with prior claims who seek more relief have until Feb. 9, 1998, to file a request for added relief under the new law.

Requests must be in writing and include all previous documentation regard-

ing the claim. Requests may not include items not listed on the original claim form.

The Air Force Claims Division at Bolling will decide if a request qualifies for added payment. Requests should be sent to the division at AFLSA/JACC, 112 Luke Ave., Ste. 343, Bolling AFB, D.C. 20332-8000.

Legal officials today have about 200 claims that exceed the \$40,000 cap and 37 that surpass prior caps that ranged from \$10,000 to \$40,000. Most stemmed from Mount Pinatubo, which destroyed most of Clark AB, Philippines, in 1991, and Hurricane Andrew, which demolished Homestead AFB, Fla., in 1992.

People who want the added relief should first check with the base legal office where they filed their original claim to make sure all documents have been forwarded to the Air Force General Claims Division.

For more information, call (202) 767-1585, or DSN 297-1585.

Burkhart, claims examiner. In fact, we are only authorized to make payments for theft or vandalism at your authorized quarters or to your POV when it is parked at your authorized quarters. If your car was broken into at someone else's house, or in a shopping center parking lot, the legal office cannot pay your claim."

Payment problems

The legal office also faces problems with payment when members fail to report and document the theft or vandalism.

"To show proof of theft," Burkhardt said, "you should report it to both the local police and the security police and keep a copy of the police report or report number. You will also have to be able to prove ownership of the item."

Property protections

People can protect property by taking basic precautions to prevent the crime from occurring in the first place. For instance, members should always lock their home and car. People shouldn't leave property, especially valuables, unattended in a car, even for a short time period.

When parking a car off base, members should remove any indications of their military status, such as a registration card or military clothing.

Even the best security measures, however, can't provide a guarantee against all crimes. Recognizing this, Jarrett said all members should obtain insurance on their personal belongings.

"Not only is it very expensive in the long run for the member to assume the claims process can be used as a substitute for taking basic precautions and obtaining personal property insurance, but it also becomes expensive for the wing because all claims are paid out of (Operations and Maintenance) funds," said Jarrett. "Every dollar paid out in personal property claims means one dollar less to support our mission requirements."

On target

MSgt. Mel Faust checks his target during the Excellence in Competition Rifle tournament at the RAF Feltwell Combat Arms range Saturday. More than 100 people competed at this Air Force-level competition. Faust and 10 other shooters scored better than 455 to qualify for the Bronze Excellence in Competition rifle badge.



Photo by SSgt. Steve Ball